

# Dragonshards

## House Phiarlan, Part Two

By Keith Baker



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### Overview

The elves of House Phiarlan carry the Mark of Shadow. The house originates from an ancient order of bards, and most people know them for their ability to entertain others. But behind the curtain they run an intelligence network that stretches across Khorvaire, and most of the powers of Khorvaire have used Phiarlan services at some point in the past.

Taken as a whole, House Phiarlan is a neutral organization. Few of the Phiarlan elves are cold-blooded killers, and while Phiarlan spies frequently break the laws of the land in their work, members of the house respect the overall structure of society. To a large degree the leaders of the house see themselves as agents of balance, evening the odds between opponents and exposing feuds that would otherwise fester and grow.

The heraldic symbol of the house is a five-headed hydra. Many say that this represents the five artistic demesnes of the house. But some maintain that the hydra symbolizes the resilience and subtlety of the house: Its eyes are everywhere, and should one head fall, two will take its place. Phiarlan uses a stylized silver mask -- the "mask of shadows" -- as a secondary symbol. This is reminiscent of the golden mask of the Undying Court; members of the house may wear an actual full-sized mask, or carry a replica of the mask as a brooch, amulet, ring, or belt buckle.

The house has many enclaves, but the most significant are the Five Demesnes. Many consider the primary enclave to be the Demesne of Shadow in Sharn, which Baron Elvinor Elorrenthi d'Phiarlan oversees. However, the known enclaves serve as the centers of Phiarlan's *artistic* endeavors. No one knows where the Serpentine Table (the espionage arm of the house) has its base of operations -- this is a mystery for the DM to decide.

Each enclave has a governing council and a baron who represents the enclave on the central council, which quarterly convenes in Sharn to discuss the business of the house. Ostensibly, political position within the house is based on talent, and members of enclave councils often include the local masters of the five disciplines. But ultimately the baron makes the appointments. The central council (or the Serpentine Table) can replace a baron who is failing in her duties or performing questionably, and this council appoints new barons when an opening appears. Small outposts have no council and are governed by the nearest enclave.

### Barons of the Stage

Best known for its Artisans and Entertainers Guild, House Phiarlan has hundreds of years to devote to a particular art. As a result, the masters of Phiarlan are legends in their fields; Tyasha d'Phiarlan (*Sharn: City of Towers*, page 70) is an example of a savant of the house. Phiarlan entertainers covered a vast spectrum of arts, and the typical Phiarlan enclave has musicians, actors, poets, dancers, and even professional escorts available. While the elves themselves are the primary ambassadors of the arts, exceptional members of other races can earn a place in one of the Five Demesnes and study at the feet of the elven masters. An entertainer with Phiarlan certification has an easier time finding work in his field -- however, he needs to possess at least 8 ranks in his

chosen art before he can earn such a degree.

## The Five Demesnes

The elves of House Phiarlan practice hundreds of different styles of song, dance, and other arts, from the ancient traditions of Xen'drik to the modern styles of Khorvaire. Long ago, the founders of the house divided the arts into five disciplines. The greatest masters and teachers of these arts have settled in the five major enclaves of the house, which are known as demesnes. The Five Demesnes of Phiarlan and the arts associated with them are described below. Teachers of all disciplines train willing students at each enclave, but someone who wants to deal with the best in the field should travel to the appropriate demesne.

**Memory.** The discipline of memory encompasses the written word. Novelists, playwrights, and poets are all students of memory. Phiarlan also considers propaganda to be a fine art. A play, a novel, or a song can have a powerful effect on public opinion, and for an extra fee a Phiarlan author can produce work that portrays the client in an especially good light -- or vilifies an opponent. Many leaders make use of Phiarlan speech writers; more than one politician has hired a disguised shadow actor to give an important speech on his behalf.

The Demesne of Memory is located in the city of Fairhaven in Aundair.

**Motion.** The discipline of motion incorporates the arts of the body. This includes dance, gymnastics, wrestling, mime, contortion, massage, and many more. Phiarlan dancers master dozens of styles and are renowned for their grace. Exceptional acrobats and contortionists may find work with the Carnival of Shadows, while lesser tumblers often entertain the commonfolk on the streets or cheap theaters. The Serpentine Table often recruits gifted students of motion; masters of motion frequently can adapt their skills to burglary and battle. Phiarlan escorts study the arts of motion and shadow. These elves are not prostitutes, but they are graceful companions gifted in conversation, dance, and massage. Dragonmarked escorts can also use their powers to adopt specific identities to fulfill the wishes of a client. Since most people are more comfortable around elves than changelings, a wealthy man who wants the company of a particular woman may hire a Phiarlan companion to impersonate her instead of a changeling.

The Demesne of Motion is located in the city of Korth in Karrnath.

**Music.** The Demesne of Music teaches the arts of sound -- both song and the use of instruments. Phiarlan bards have scoured Khorvaire for musical traditions, and some instructors can teach the arts of Adaran chant and other obscure styles. Most Phiarlan bards spend some time at the Demesne of Music, though many also study at the Demesne of Shadow.

The Demesne of Music is located in the city of Flamekeep in Thrane.

**Shape.** The Demesne of Shape covers the creation of physical objects. One of the primary duties of the Demesne of Shape is the creation of the resources the house requires for its entertainers -- costumes, sets, props, instruments, and the like. However, the Artisans and Entertainers Guild also covers aesthetic art, and sculptors, painters, and potters can all learn their trades at this demesne. The sale of such goods is a significant source of income for the house, and the woodsmiths of Phiarlan are said to be the finest outside of Aerenal itself.

The first Demesne of Shape was located in the city of Metrol in Cyre. The destruction of Cyre dealt a blow to the house, but at the start of the war Phiarlan had spread the resources of the house across the Five Nations to avoid just such a disaster, and miraculously (some say suspiciously) all the finest teachers and artisans were

visiting other demesnes on the Day of Mourning. The new Demesne of Shape has been established in Wroat, in Breland.

While the finest artists survived the Mourning, a great deal of Phiarlan craftwork and mystical tools were lost in the fall of Cyre. The house may wish to hire a team of adventurers to venture into the Mournland and recover objects from Metrol -- or perhaps a PC member of the house could find herself performing this task as a show of loyalty to the house.

**Shadow.** In its broadest sense, the discipline of Shadow covers the art of deception. This includes illusion, which the house has refined into a fine art; Phiarlan dream parlors and shadow weavers use magic to produce astonishing shows. It also includes literal shadow plays and puppetry -- arts in which the actual actor performs at a distance from the audience. But the Demesne of Shadow also serves as the center for verbal arts of deception and coercion, feigned emotion, and role assumption. Actors and orators learn their craft at this demesne, and while a storyteller may learn his tales at the Demesne of Memory, he learns to deliver a tale at the Demesne of Shadow. Stealth and sleight of hand are also taught in this place, since the stagehand and the puppeteer need to hide in the shadows and avoid the gaze of the audience. Of course, while this is the public reason for such training, many of those who study the arts of stealth are actually members of the Serpentine Table -- or hope to be recruited by this inner circle.

The Demesne of Shadow is located in Sharn, in Breland. With the destruction of the first Demesne of Music, it is the oldest of the Five Demesnes and is the current home of the house matriarch.

## Services and Events

In general, a well-staffed Phiarlan enclave can provide any sort of entertainment. Most Phiarlan entertainers are experts versed in a range of Perform skills. However, many true bards who can weave magic into their performances are also in the house. The house runs a number of theaters, but Phiarlan bards often work with local establishments; Phiarlan actors often take center stage regardless of who owns the theater.

In addition to these general performances, a few events of note are held by the house. The annual reenactments of the battles between the elves and the dragons are extremely popular. But the best-known work of the house is the Carnival of Shadows, which is a traveling circus that combines illusion, physical arts, and exotic beasts from across Eberron. Three separate companies of the Carnival of Shadows migrate between the major cities of Khorvaire, and they reach even the Lhazaar Principalities and the Talenta Plains. From an adventuring perspective, the carnival offers a variety of hooks. To begin with, agents of the Serpentine Table often travel with the Carnival of Shadows; this could result in adventurers coming into conflict with Phiarlan schemes when the circus comes to town, or it could mean that PCs working with the house are sent to join the carnival. The beasts that travel with the circus can also pose a challenge; an escaped monster could wreak havoc on a city, or adventurers could find themselves hired to capture an exotic creature in Xen'drik and transport it -- alive -- back to Khorvaire.

## Heirloom Performances

While House Phiarlan has split off from Aerenal and has no ties to the Undying Court, the members of the house still hold the memories of their ancestors and their history in high regard. The greatest treasures of the house are the works of ancient artists -- the dance with which Jhazalaen Elorrenthi blinded the King of Fire, the song that Maenol sang as the elves boarded the boats to leave Xen'drik, and similar epic works. While every member of the house can perform some of these, many of the greatest works of the house are considered to be heirloom

performances. Only one living elf has the right to perform a particular heirloom. This is a tremendous honor, and every Phiarlan bard strives to prove her worth to inherit such a treasure. Traditionally, the bearer of the heirloom chooses her successor, but should she die without designating an heir, the council of the appropriate demesne can select a new elf to perform the art. Stories have circulated about how demesne councils assassinate unworthy heirs so the heirloom could be transferred to a superior artist -- but these stories have never been proven.

**Next:** The three-part coverage of House Phiarlan concludes with a look at the secret work of the house and the life of an agent of the shadows!

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## About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of **Eberron** to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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